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TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [EU](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: ANDALUSIAN FIRES RAVAGE 35,000 ACRES

REF: LISBON 01196

1. SUMMARY: Since July 27, forest fires have raged out of control and burned more than 35,000 acres in the Andalusian provinces of Huelva and Sevilla. Authorities have evacuated more than 1,160 people from the surrounding areas affected by the flames. The 2004 fire season may be one of the worst in recent years, as to date 40% more lands have been destroyed by fire this year than in 2003. These fires continue to threaten environmentally sensitive ecological reserves and forest lands in the region. END SUMMARY.

2. The largest forest fire in Andalusia in the past five years, which started on July 27, has devastated approximately 35,000 acres in the region. Authorities have determined that the blaze began when garbage container fires went out of control and ignited surrounding brush. The fires have cut through various national parks and wildlife reserves in the Andalusian provinces of Huelva and Sevilla and have caused the evacuation of more than 1,160 people from small towns located in the path of the fire. Evacuated towns include Monte Sorromero, Las Delgadas, El Madrono, El Alamo, Minas de Riotinto, and Berrocal. The only known deaths from the fires occurred on July 27 when smoke overwhelmed a married couple as they drove through the area near the start of the blazes.

3. Approximately 250 fire fighters joined 15 fire trucks, 12 planes, 19 helicopters, and police and fire fighters from the province of Huelva in fighting the Andalusian blazes. Other smaller fires in the northern regions of Galicia, Castilla-Leon, and Asturias, accompanied by the Andalusian fires threaten to make this one of the worst fire seasons in recent history. Forest fires this year have already burned 40% more acreage than last year, comparing year to year figures. The Ministry of the Environment reports that humans provoke 80-90% of forest fires in Spain, as is the case in the Andalusian fires.

4. On Wednesday the Minister of the Environment, Cristina Narbona, called for zero tolerance against individuals who cause forest fires, and made a plea to the people of Spain to be more careful when burning fields and with campfires. She was concerned with the loss of vegetation and wildlife in the very sensitive Coto Nacional de Pata del Caballo ecological reserve. Flames threatened the reserve on the afternoon of July 28, closing in from five different hot points, which made combating the flames extremely difficult for fire fighters. The fires in Andalusia continue threatening other environmentally sensitive areas such as La Sierra de San Pedro (which sustained heavily damaged by forest fires last summer) and El Castillo de las Guardas Nature Reserves.

5. COMMENT: Thus far, the GOS seems fully capable of handling fire fighting efforts. Unlike the Portugese Government, the GOS has made no request for outside assistance of which we are aware.

MANZANARES